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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SUBJECT Flying Activity over Vitebsk

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November 1946 to March 1949

1. Flying over VITEBSK (30°12'E/55°11'N) has increased steadily since October 1948. Twin-engine aircraft were seen every day flying individually and in formations of up to nine planes, the following types being in evidence:
 - a. Low-wing monoplane, wings in slight dihedral, two in-line engines, nose wheel, single rudder assembly with small rear stump projecting beyond trailing edge, glazed nose, glazed rear gunner's station in rear third of fuselage.
 - b. Plane similar to above type but without nose wheel, glazed nose and rear gunner's station.
2. The aircraft approached an area of the railroad line to ORSHA (30°26'E/54°30'N), where from three to six paratroopers jumped from each plane. This was repeated as many as ten times a day. Towed cargo gliders occasionally were released over the airfield and landed there. This was also repeated up to ten times. According to local residents, the airfield was very large.
3. Two truckloads of army soldiers were taken almost daily to a settlement west of LORONIKI, a half-mile south of the Dvina River and west of the railroad line to ORSHA. A captive balloon was hoisted there to an altitude of 650 to 1,000 feet about the time the trucks were expected to arrive. Two paratroopers jumped from the balloon shortly afterward. The balloon was then pulled down and the procedure was repeated. These practices lasted two to three hours.
4. Soviet Army work details, with soldiers of various classes and branches of service but all assigned to the same unit, have been observed in the T.B.K. 2 Plant since November 1948. The following information was obtained from Soviet soldiers:

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A school where Soviet army soldiers were given four-week courses in parachuting was established in the VITEBSK former Artillery School in the fall of 1948. The trainees underwent a physical examination before attending these courses. They expected to return to their units on completion of the course. * Officers and EM of all branches of service participated in these courses, each of which was attended by four hundred men. The old artillery school was about a mile west of the town limits of VITEBSK and about a thousand feet south of the Dvina River.

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1947 to March 1949

5. The following aircraft were first observed in late November and early December 1948:

a. Four-engine transport aircraft:** Length of fuselage about 75 feet, wing span about 100 feet, tapered trailing edge. Strikingly long nose forward of leading edge of wing. Landing gear retracted, but a rubber-tired wheel distinctly visible under the nose. These aircraft first observed one to three times a week, flying at an altitude of 1,500 to 2,000 feet and ascending to an altitude of about 2,500 feet. They came from the east and headed southeast after flying over the plant and the Dvina River. They towed cargo gliders (length of fuselage about 66 feet, wing span about 80 feet), which were released about five miles east of the railroad line to ORSHA. The gliders, followed by the planes, landed in an easterly direction. These aircraft have been more frequently observed since about January 1949. They flew all day, and also at night since about March 1949, judging from the noise of engines. Five or six aircraft of this type were continually observed in the air every day since late February and early March 1949. They came from the same direction and flew at the same altitude and with the same course as the aircraft previously mentioned, but had no cargo gliders in tow. Groups of eight to ten parachutists jumped from each plane over the area southeast of the plant. This activity was repeated throughout the day at intervals of about 30 minutes. During these practices, a captive balloon was hoisted on a hill east of the area where the parachutists descended.

b. Twin-engine bombers:*** Glazed nose, length about 66 feet, wing span about 60 feet, double rudder assembly, dihedral wings, landing gear and tail wheel retracted, low-pitched noise of engines. Aircraft of this type flew daily in wedge formation of three to twelve planes, at an altitude of about 2,500 feet. These aircraft, unlike the four-engine aircraft, had been stationed in the VITEBSK area since 1947 or 1948. Their number was not increased in 1949.

c. Biplanes: Four or five planes were observed every day, even in winter and bad weather.

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February 1947 to March 1949

6. There has been a great deal of day and night flying over VITEBSK since early 1949. The following aircraft types were observed flying in early January 1949 and in increased number since March 1949:

a. Four-engine transports.** Nose projecting unusually far beyond leading edge of wing. Oblong glazed cockpit on top of fuselage and glazed rear gunner's station. Length about 80 feet, wing span about 100 feet. Five or six of these planes were observed every day since March 1949, flying at an altitude of 1,600 to 2,000 feet. They approached from the northeast and flew over MARKOVSHINA, heading southeast. Groups of six to eight parachutists were observed from the plant jumping from each plane over an open area about 3 miles southeast of the plant and east of the railroad line to OTCHA. The paratroopers drifted in an easterly direction toward a captive balloon which was hoisted to an altitude of 500 to 600 feet at some distance. It was inferred that an airfield was east of the jump area. Five or six other planes appeared about twenty minutes later. The same procedure was repeated every day within about two hours of noon.

A plane of the same type towing a cargo glider (wing span about 80 feet, length about 66 feet) approached the jump area almost every day from the same direction, at an altitude of about 2,500 feet. The glider was released near the jump area and landed to the east. The plane disappeared in the same direction. The same plane appeared about twenty minutes later towing another cargo glider. This activity was continued until evening. Single four-engine aircraft were also heard at night over MARKOVSHINA.

b. Twin-engine bombers:***Glazed nose, wings dihedral, double rudder assembly, length 50 to 65 feet, wing span about 65 feet. Aircraft of this type have been observed every day since the summer of 1948, flying in wedge formations of up to twelve planes, at an altitude of about 2,500 feet. Individual planes were seldom seen.

c. Single-engine fighters: Ø Very fast and maneuverable, length about 33 feet, wing span about 33 feet, swept back wings, high-pitched engine noise. Front compartment of engine rather long, and rudder assembly rather big. Landing gear and tail wheel retracted. Aircraft of this type were observed every day, but in fewer numbers than the previously mentioned types, flying at an altitude of about 2,000 feet, six to ten individual planes being the maximum number observed.

25X1 ☐ Comment:

- a. The training of parachutists and airborne troops was previously observed in the VITEBSK area.

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25X1 b. The aircraft types cannot be identified from the inaccurate and presumably erroneous descriptions of para 1 through 4.

* c. The reported detaching of Soviet Army soldiers to parachute training courses was confirmed by previous reports and is considered credible.

** d. The reported four-engine transport aircraft are either IL-18s or TU-70s. Their estimated length and wing span seem to be underrated. The small number (eight to ten) of parachutists reported jumping from each plane is incomprehensible. The employment of four-engine aircraft seems to be justified only by their towing cargo gliders, which according to their estimated dimensions, were almost as big as the towing planes. It is inferred that this probably is a large cargo glider type, as was assumed from previous reports on the ELIN and STAKHANOVO airfields.

*** 25X1 e. The same twin-engine bombers were observed. It may be concluded from the reported "dihedral wings" that they are IR-4s.

ø f. Believed to be one of the latest Yak fighters.

25X1 Comment:

† T.S.K. possibly stands for Tanko-Selmash Kombinat (Tank and Agricultural Machine Combine).

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